

THE ROMEO OBSERVER

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Macomb Orchard Trail completed after 9 years



(Observer photos by Chris Gray)

HIT THE OPEN TRAIL. Above, from left, Washington Township Clerk Kathy Bosheers, Dist. 7 County Commissioner Don Brown, Congresswoman Candice Miller, County Executive Mark Hackel and Dist. 8 County Commissioner Kathy Vosburg cut a ribbon to signify the completion of the Macomb Orchard Trail. Below right, a completed bridge on the Macomb Orchard Trail just east of Powell Road. Below bottom, the new trailside park located on Clinton Street in Romeo. The site was formerly a station for the Macomb County Road Department that has been cleaned up and paved with a parking lot for access to the trail.



by CHRIS GRAY

Observer Staff Writer – 10-19-2011

A milestone for Macomb County has been completed, though it may be more appropriate to call it a 24-milestone.

On a sunny Oct. 11 morning, dignitaries and residents alike celebrated the official opening of the final paved section of the Macomb Orchard Trail with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Like the pounding of a golden spike into a railroad track, county representatives and

local officials cut a red ribbon stretching across a bridge east of Powell Road, marking the completion of the trail that connects northern Macomb County.

Dist. 7 County Commissioner Don Brown, an advocate of the trail since its inception in 2002, said the event was an important day in county history because it established the first linear park that can be used by people of all ages.

"I'm psyched about this," he said. "We didn't have to raise taxes to do this, this was largely funded with grant dollars, and I think people appreciate that, too."

The trail is a paved, non-motorized hike and bike path that stretches 24 miles. It begins at 24 Mile Road and Dequindre in Shelby Township and stretches northeast to Richmond.

Before it became a trail, the property belonged to the Canadian National Railroad and was up for sale for \$5.4 million. However, the county was able to purchase it in 2001 for \$3.5 million.

The first phase of the trail began in 2003 and was completed in 2004, with the second phase engineering the final 17 miles in 2005. However, the trail between Armada Ridge and 33 Mile Road to downtown Richmond remained a stone trail.

In 2008, a pedestrian bridge over M-53 was completed that gives trail-goers a safe way to traverse the bypass, followed by the stone trail between Armada Township and Richmond being asphalted in 2010 and 2011.

County Executive Mark Hackel said he was excited to see the completion of the trail, thanking the Macomb Department of Roads for its work in developing it.

"We talk about economic development, but the reason people move to Macomb County is a lot more to do with community development, and this trail system out here in the northern part of the county is just incredible," he said.

Dist. 10 Congresswoman Candice Miller said the trails enhance those that have already been constructed, such as on Metropolitan Parkway, and hopes communities and governments will continue to add to what she called "long, linear parks."

"It has been a complete team effort to make this orchard trail a reality," she said. "I look forward to continuing some of the links that are still missing."

She pointed to the county's increase in population over the past decade, saying residents are moving here looking for quality of life assets.

"People are going to continue to come here because they want this kind of facility to be able to recreate on," she said.

Brown, who was part of the initial push on the County Board of Commissioners for the trail as well as belonging to the Macomb Orchard Trail Commission, said future plans are to add more amenities.

"This trail will continue to be a work in progress, but the main track is down now," he said.

A trail-side park on Clinton Street in Romeo is among the new additions to the trail. What was once an abandoned Macomb Department of Roads station will become a parking lot and connection to the trail.

Brown said he expects the park to be completed by the end of October.

"It's a really big improvement over what it was," said Brown.

He said there are also talks of creating more parking in the Village of Armada where the trail intersects with North Road.

The development of the trail is discussed by the Macomb Orchard Trail Commission, a group of representatives from various communities that meets on a monthly basis.